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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

R. Rm -

LIKELIHOOD OF GENERAL WAR THROUGH 1957

SNIE 11-54

Approved 10 February 1954

Published 15 February 1954

The Intelligence Advisory Committee concurred in this estimate on 10 February 1954. See, however, footnotes of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, to paragraphs 5 and 6. The FBI abstained, the subject being outside of its jurisdiction.

The following member organizations of the Intelligence Advisory Committee participated with the Central Intelligence Agency in the preparation of this estimate: The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

ACCOUNTABLE DOCUMENT
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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LIKELIHOOD OF GENERAL WAR THROUGH 1957

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the likelihood of general war with the USSR during the period through 1957.

ESTIMATE

1. We believe that the Kremlin will remain fundamentally hostile to the US and that the capability of the USSR to wage general war, including its capability to attack the continental US, will continue to increase during the period of this estimate.

2. The Kremlin probably considers that opportunities will continue to exist during the period through 1957 for increasing Soviet influence and perhaps expanding the area of Soviet control by methods short of general war. As its major course of action short of general war the USSR will continue to use the pressure of its growing military capabilities and its international Communist apparatus to try to undermine the political, economic, and psychological strength of the free world in order to give the Kremlin greater initiative in the struggle for its ultimate objective of a Communist world dominated from Moscow and to reduce the freedom of action of the US and its allies to combat it.

3. Soviet Bloc superiority in ground forces employing conventional weapons will continue throughout the period of this estimate. The Soviet stockpile of nuclear weapons will steadily grow. The Kremlin is aware, however, that the West will through 1957 have superior strategic air power and naval power, a larger atomic stockpile, and greater industrial potential. The Kremlin also probably considers that the USSR is making substantial progress toward reducing its disadvantages in these respects, particularly as regards stockpile and types of nuclear weapons.

4. We believe that during the period of this estimate the Communist rulers will continue to consider general war a hazardous gamble, involving at a minimum the certainty of widespread destruction in the USSR and at the same time carrying with it the risk that the Soviet system itself would be destroyed.[1]

5. On the basis of the foregoing, we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will deliberately initiate general war during the period through 1957. We also believe that the Kremlin will try to avoid courses of action which in its judgment would clearly involve substantial risk of general war.[2]

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[1] In making this estimate it is assumed that there will be no basic change in US policy with respect to the utilization of nuclear weapons for defense against aggression.

[2] It is the view of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, that paragraph 5 should read as follows:

5. It seems logical, therefore, to estimate that the Soviets should prefer to avoid general war as a means of accomplishing their objectives and that the Kremlin should try to avoid courses of action which in its judgment would clearly involve substantial risk of global conflict. We believe it probable that through 1957 the odds are somewhat against Soviet initiation of general war. Nevertheless, the intelligence supporting this estimate is insufficient to warrant a conclusion that the USSR would not resort to such action should the Soviet leaders believe:

a. That they had the capability to neutralize Allied forces and so disrupt and isolate the United States as to provide positive assurance of the success of Soviet efforts on a world-wide basis.

b. That a shift in the balance of power was developing and that it constituted a grave threat to the security of the USSR that could be successfully countered only by general war.

c. That a Western attack on the USSR was imminent and unavoidable and that Soviet chances of surviving such an attack would be improved by seizing the initiative.

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6. We believe, however, that the Kremlin would not be deterred by the risk of general war from taking counteractions against a western action which it considered an imminent threat to Soviet security. Moreover, the USSR or one of the Soviet Bloc countries might take action creating a situation in which the US or its allies, rather than yield an important position, might have to take counteraction involving grave risk of general war with the USSR. Thus general war might occur between now and the end of 1957 as the climax of a series of actions and counteractions, initiated by either side, which neither side originally intended to lead to general war.[3]

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[3] It is the view of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, that paragraph 6 should read as follows:

6. In addition, general war might occur between now and the end of 1957 as the climax of a series of actions and counteractions, initiated by either side, which neither side originally intended to lead to general war.

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